





# THE CHINA MAIL.

FRIDAY, APRIL 23, 1897.

## LECTURE ON PROFESSOR BLACKIE'S 'GRAMP OLD MAN.'

This afternoon, Mr W. C. Barlow delivered a lecture to the 'Odd Volumes' on the late Professor John Stuart Blackie. There was a small attendance. The Hon. J. H. Stewart Lockhart, Colonial Secretary, presided.

Mr Barlow said.—In one sense, everyone knows Professor Blackie. His photographs were as familiar in Fleet Street as in Aberdeen. His portrait in oil was the first familiar object which caught the attention of Queen Victoria on the opening day of the Edinburgh Exhibition. I have never seen a more perfect portrait of the man. Punch's caricatures presented with remarkable fidelity the capital of Blackie's humour and the metie-like silver locks. The face was a type of individual vigour and poetic temperament. It might serve as a painter's model for a Celtic bard or a Greek philosopher. Figure and form seemed to defy the touch of time, and those who heard the old man lecture forgot the intrusive record of his years.

To them, he could be neither old nor young; he was but himself. John Stuart Blackie, the great philologist, Gael of the Gaels, and Greek of modern Classical Greeks, versatile opponent of Ernest Jones' republicanism, of John Stuart Mill's eccentricities in moral philosophy, of Max Muller's 'Indo and Aryan' in ancient mythology, the genial preceptor of youth, the metrical translator of Aesop and Goethe, the song-writer for students, the ballad-writer for the masses, the author of 'Myths and Marvels' and pamphlets that had been everywhere a bombshell, 'the Professor' at Modern Athens as distinguished as 'Christopher North' was sixty years ago. 1809 was the year of Talavera and the culminating point of the Peninsular war, the year that turned the tide of conquest and commenced teaching Europe that Napoleon was not invincible. It was also the year of the birth of such men as Gladstone, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and John Stuart Blackie. Blackie's father was a Kelso banker of Covenanter stock and married to a Stodart, herself also descended from 'the persecuted remnant.' John Stuart Blackie was born in Glasgow, but taken to Aberdeen in his third year. He was a kindly, merry child, beloved by his nurses, and curiously enough up to his ninth year, he refused to learn even the Alphabet. He was a shrewd child, too, and when a lady of much teaching experience was asked to begin him into study and thought to teach him with a pen of ivory letters, delving him into the depths of the Abydos, John said that he did not like to be flogged into lessons. The next year, he was sent to school, and made the discovery that other boys of his own age could read and write. This roused the spirit of emulation in him, and by a sort of instantaneous conversion he promptly became most diligent, learning by the ear as well as by the eye, shouting his lessons about the house, singing his Latin in the playground, as some of us have heard him sing Greek, marching up and down the narrow platform of the dingy Greek class-room of the University. Many years later, he said of these days: 'I might wish to retain for ever the mixed elements of youth and manhood that belong to middle age—to the season between twenty and forty—but I never could seriously desire to have been eternally a boy. A boy is a fruitful thing, for a spectator to contemplate, but a somewhat barren and very imperfect thing to be.'

However, I was quite happy in my boyhood in the measure that happiness belongs to the age, and have not a single mortal sorrow to record. At the age of 22, I got my lessons carefully, kept at the top of my class, or quite alone, and enjoyed foot-tops, marbles, 'Bobbers and Rangers' and other sports in their season, with that healthy gusto that belongs to all normally-constituted British boys. I got my lessons carefully, but I cannot say that this proceeded from any particular love either of books or lessons. I imagine it was merely from the natural energy of my character, with an ambitious impulse that did not like to be last, where there was a fair chance to be first. I was put into a little world—the school—where action was the law, and it was contrary to my nature to be lazy or to last. I was called upon to act for honour and glory with my equals, and I did my best with decision. That was the whole secret of my school activity.

**ART OF PIETY.** From 12 to 16 he was at Marischal College in Aberdeen, where he took one prize, third for mathematics; not that he was by any means a Mathematician but that Mathematical subjects were as well taught by Dr Knight that a lad of Blackie's energy must learn well. When he left the College, he was apprenticed to a solicitor, but the sudden death of a young companion scared him into one of those hysterical fits of piety that some Christians still think a necessary experience before a man can become pious. He abjured for a time not pleasure merely, but even the study of science, and insisted on being sent to Divinity. For two years he was miserable (as many others have been) because he could not point to a definite date and hour and say 'At this moment I was born again.'

**THE TURNING POINT OF HIS CAREER.** But we must hurry on to the turning point of his career, when he exchanged his clerical robes for gold. Latin for Greek, when he came to Edinburgh in 1852. The election to the Greek Chair was in the hands of the Lord Provost, Baillies and members of the Town Council of Edinburgh, respectively. The election of the £12,000 necessary for its endowment to choose the best man, but they must have found their ignorance of classical culture and its importance greatly limiting their power to assess and subdivide the foot of testimonials submitted by the various candidates. John Stuart Blackie's most brilliant rival was Dr. Smith, now Sir William Smith, the distinguished mineralogist. Blackie had influential friends; but his most dangerous enemy was himself. In November he began by issuing his thirty-three bundles of testimonials and forwarding them to the Councillors without preparing the postage. This unparsonable carelessness would, with a body of business men, destroy the impressiveness of the documents at once. Then, at Christmas-time, he came up to Edinburgh in the notorious Blackie costume, and called on the thirty-three, one after another. He had been such a candidate. Five minutes of reckless jumpy discourses, an attack on the narrow-mindedness of the circle of society he was addressing, a burst of laughter and a shrug of his shoulders as he departed were not reassuring to grave and responsible Baillies, and by January the election of the Greek tragic poet, a work for which he was but partially fitted. It may be true that he had not grown enough to be a transitor, but at all events he was appointed to the Chair.

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To Professor Forbes at Aberdeen belongs the honour of brushing away these Calvinistic cobwebs. 'What have you to do with books of divinity? Are you a Christian? What should a Christian read before his bible? Do you know Greek? Whence should a student of Theology fetch his divinity, in preference to the Greek Testament?' The result of this good advice was immediate and final. He finished his University course, but hesitated to take steps towards ordination, and again Dr Forbes interceded, this time advising Blackie's father—with admirable directness—'Send him to Germany; his jacket wants widening.'

**PACKED OFF TO GERMANY.** When I was in Edinburgh two and a-half years ago, the Arts' classes were opening for the Winter Session, and Blackie was present at the inaugural lecture in the Civil Law Class-room. A speech was demanded, and the old man seized the opportunity to impress on the students the value of foreign travel. 'When I was nineteen,' he said, 'my father put a hundred pounds in my pocket and packed me off to Germany. Ask your fathers to do the same by you.' Certainly the two years he now spent abroad had the happiest effect on his character, showed him what University teaching should be, and paved the way for the reforms which he had a great share in introducing and led to a revolution in the university into which all higher education was now to be settling. His first effort, however, was to the student His Et Berlin, and he failed twice, urging him to consult a doctor. He grinded the waist of valuable time, but found that a medical man lived close to the university. This was Captain. He could manage the business in five minutes time, and then in the evening, when he wrote home and in my something of his doctor and his prescriptions. But it was unluckily happened that there was a classical book-shop there, where Greek Latin and German books could be bought at a moderate price. Into this shop he went and found several books for which he had been looking with desire. But

there happened to be only a single lira in his pocket. This he had destined for the physician. Here therefore was an auction in his head, the books and the physician bidding for the lira. The claim of the one won in his estimation much greater than those of the other. The consequence was, the doctor lost his prey. Certainly residence in Germany 'widened his jacket considerably. Even his father, who had sent him there to broaden his sympathies, was shocked to hear that his son had given up theatre-going for the importance of his pronunciation. Dr. Smith complained that Blackie and Macdonald, Dr. Smith falling behind. The third vote gave Blackie and Macdonald 16, and Lord Provost 15. Dr. Provost, who himself had proposed Dr. Smith, now gave his casting vote to Prof. Blackie. And then began the thirty years of glad work that have stamped such a mark upon the world that for fifty years to come there will be thousands in all parts of the world who will cherish the name of Blackie, as they cherish the memory of Almud Mata.

## ECCENTRICITY.

The next five and twenty years of his life I must pass lightly over; it would require a volume rather than half-an-hour's desultory talk to follow the professor through the maze of interwoven activity that he threaded during these years. I think it is Barrie who says (in his 'Edinburgh Eleven') that Blackie realised that truth does not lie in the 'Vie des Morts' (middle of the way), but rather in the 'vies' (sides) and the 'one' (straight) course is a zigzag. The brain becomes dizzy as it contemplates the Blackie, whole-hearted and perfectly honest, blithely hurling his weight of argument, poetry and humour into the air. He taught in the University, and variously discovered that Marischal College, Aberdeen, stood alone among Universities in having no Latin chair, and endowed one. Blackie was promoted to it in spite of the candidature of a Latinist so eminent and experienced as Dr. Miall. Not unnaturally, he was a little wistful for the position he had denominated as a 'Whig job.' It was certainly a new departure, for professors in Scottish Universities were expected at that time to be good grinders, and this Blackie was never. Whether the language was Latin or Greek as soon as he looked it up it became a living thing, and he seized the opportunity of making the subject ironically called 'Humanity' worthy of the title, alive scholarship, not a profitless wandering among the bones of the dead.

## HIS FIRST PROFESSORSHIP.

Two years passed between his appointment as a professor and his first appearance in that character. Signature to the Westminster Confession was then exacted from all professors. And with this he refused to comply. At last he yielded so far as to affix his name, making at the same time a public statement that the subscription he had made did not imply an avowal of the creed each clause expressed but of an agreement to respect that creed in exercise of his professorial duties. After petitioning and remonstrances, citations and denials of jurisdiction, the Aberdeen Presbytery were defeated, and he was duly installed at the age of 32 in the chair he occupied for eleven years. In his first lecture he brushed aside scurrilously the subject ironically called 'Humanity' worthy of the title, alive scholarship, not a profitless wandering among the bones of the dead.

Now at last he was settled in a post for which he was well fitted, and like a wise man he married in the following spring. No one who has known the Blackie household, and I trust there are several such, will ever forget Mrs Blackie's geniality and kindness. She and he were such delightful company, the Professor always affectionate with her, she stately, calmer, but giving the impression of such good-heartedness that every guest felt himself at home. Between them the two could penetrate and destroy the shell of reserve that a young Scotch student is apt to put on when he is placed in a highly-distinguished company, and it would be difficult to say whether it was Blackie himself or Mrs Blackie who formed the life of those supper and breakfast parties in the last year at Douglas Crescent.

## HIS HOME LIFE.

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## UNIVERSITY REFORM.

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## Notices to Consignees.

NOTICE TO CONSIGNEES.  
THE PENINSULAR & ORIENTAL  
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Optional goods will be landed here unless instructions are given to the contrary before 4 p.m. to day.

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No compensation will be effected by me in any case whatever.

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H. A. RITCHIE,  
Superintendent.

Hongkong, April 21, 1897. 801

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Paid-up Capital..... £265,500.00  
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Hongkong, July 23, 1896. 1547

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CAPITAL PAID UP, £180,000.  
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TOTAL ANNUAL INCOME, £250,000.

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10,000  
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The Co.'s Steamship  
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The British Steamship  
*Hurricane*

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Hongkong, April 15, 1897. 777

NOTICE.

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MARITIMES.

PAQUEBOTS POSTE FRANCAIS.

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The Co.'s Steamship  
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(Taking Care at through route to  
ANTWERP, AMSTERDAM, ROTTER-  
DAM, LISBON, OPORTO, LIVER-  
POOL AND BIRMINGHAM).

The Steamship  
*Bertha*,  
Capt. TR. HILDEBRANDT,  
will be despatched for the above Ports on SATURDAY, the 1st May.

This steamship has superior Accommodation  
for First and Second Class Passengers  
and carries a Doctor and a Stewardess.

For Freight or passage, apply to

SIEMSEN & CO.,  
Agents.

Hongkong, April 10, 1897. 788

UNION ASSURANCE SOCIETY.

(Instituted in the Reign of Queen Anne  
A.D. 1714).

CAPITAL FULLY SUBSCRIBED, £450,000.

CAPITAL PAID UP, £180,000.

TOTAL INVESTED FUNDS EXCEED £2,900,000.

TOTAL ANNUAL INCOME, £250,000.

THE Undersigned, having been appointed

Agents of the above Society in Hongkong,

are prepared to issue POLICIES against

Fire on the usual terms.

HARRY WICKING & CO.,  
1421, Praya Central.

## Intimations.

AMERICAN SYSTEM  
OF  
DENTISTRY.

AT  
62, QUEEN'S ROAD CENTRAL,  
CHADWICK K.E.W.  
(LATE OF POYNT & NOBLE)

Hongkong, December 19, 1896. 2586

## Mails.

NORTHERN PACIFIC  
STEAMSHIP AND RAILWAY  
COMPANIES.

VIA INLAND SEA OF JAPAN.

The attention of Passengers is directed  
to the very cheap rates offered by this  
line to the Pacific Coast and to the  
Interior and Eastern Cities of the United  
States and Canada and to Europe.

RONGKONG TO LONDON, £400.

Excellent accommodation. First class  
Table, Doctor and Stewardess carried.

HONGKONG TO NEW YORK, £850.

The Railroad travelling is second to none  
on the American Continent. Magnificent  
Scenery of the Rocky and Cascade Moun-  
tains. The Yellowstone National Park  
route. Passengers to Europe may proceed  
by one of the first class ATLANTIC MAIL  
LINES.

HONGKONG TO TACOMA, £235.

Rate of Passage to other Points on ap-  
plication.

Special rates allowed to members of Go-  
vernmental Services.

PROPOSED SAILINGS FROM HONGKONG.  
(SUBJECT TO ALTERATION).

Monte Carlo | Tuesday | April 27.

Paris | 27/5 | Tuesday | May 4.

Tacoma | 2,649 | Tuesday | May 25.

Victoria | 3,167 | Tuesday | June 15.

Olympia | 2,668 | Tuesday | July 6.

London | 2,769 | Tuesday | July 27.

PROPOSED SAILINGS FROM HONGKONG.  
(SUBJECT TO ALTERATION).

Bayern | Tuesday | April 27.

Prinz Heinrich | Tuesday | May 25.

Preussen | Tuesday | June 22.

Sachsen | Tuesday | July 30.

Bayern | Tuesday | August 17.

Prinz Heinrich | Tuesday | Sept. 14.

Preussen | Tuesday | October 12.

Sachsen | Tuesday | November 9.

Bayern | Tuesday | December 7.

Prinz Heinrich | Tuesday | January 4.

THE day, the 27th day of April,  
1897, at 9 a.m., the Company's  
sailing the 25th Inst., will proceed to  
VICTORIA, (B.C.), and TACOMA and  
YOKOHAMA, with  
MAILS, PASSENGERS, SPELLE, and  
CARGO.

Parcels must be sent to our Office (with  
address marked in full) by 5 p.m., on the  
day previous to sailing.

For further information as to Passage or  
Freight, apply to

DODWELL, CARLILL & CO.,  
General Agents.

Hongkong, April 16, 1897. 777



